

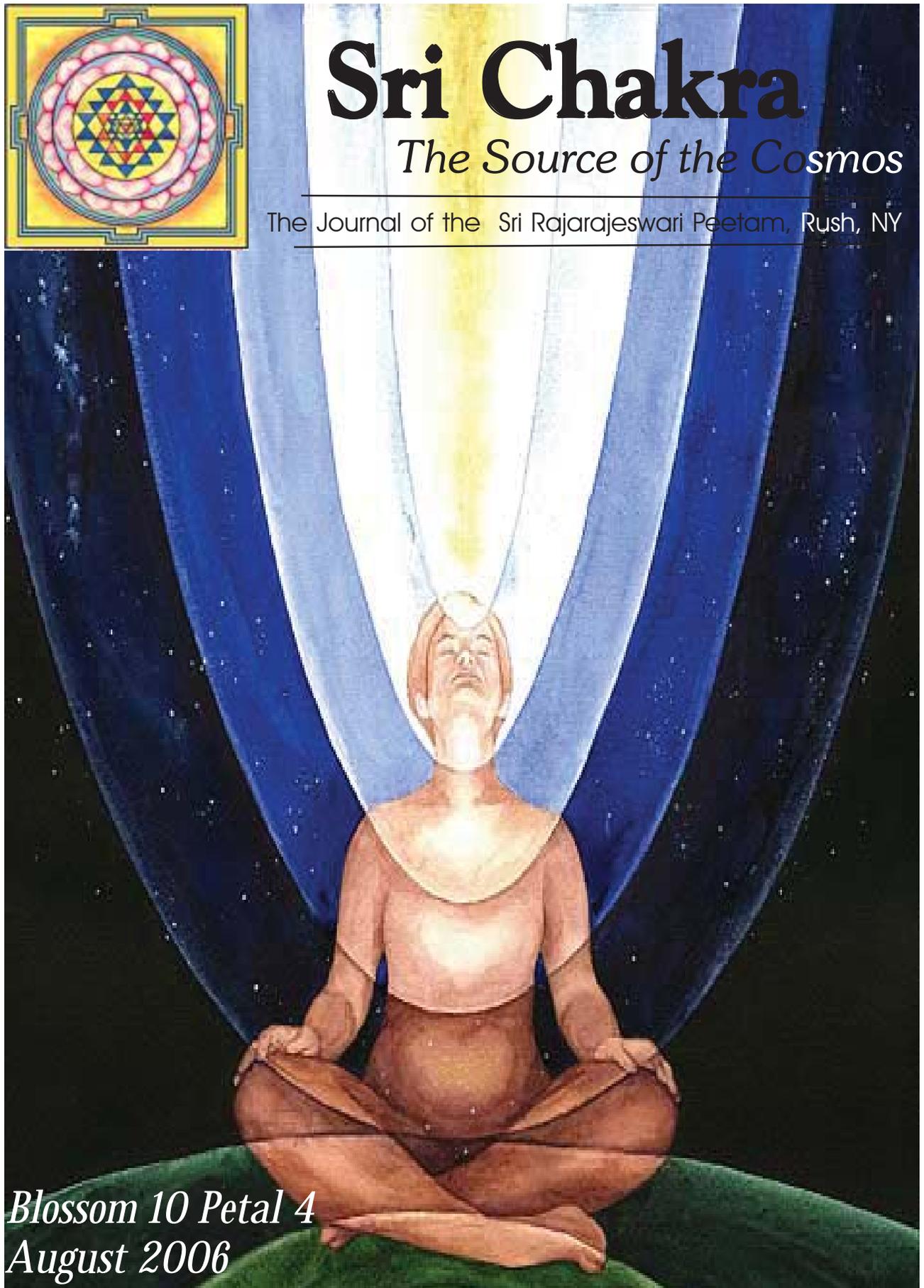


Sri Chakra

The Source of the Cosmos

The Journal of the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam, Rush, NY

*Blossom 10 Petal 4
August 2006*



OUR THOUGHTS

Dear Devotees,

People who regularly attend the temple will invariably notice at one time or another a person asking Aiya a variation of the age-old question: "Why doesn't God hear my prayers?"

Sometimes the question has to do with the person not being able to hear God, or God not answering the person. Whatever the exact wording, the issue always has to do with a communication gap between the worshiper and the deity.

Aiya often says that Devi is talking all the time to each and every one of us, but we are the ones who are not listening. Sometimes it is due to our focus on our everyday lives, like keeping our doctor's appointments, doing our homework, getting dinner on the table, taking the garbage out, and feeding the dog. Sometimes our spiritual hearing problem has to do with inner noise, or our repeated *thinking* about taking the garbage out and feeding the dog.

A lot of the time, we don't hear Devi because we're analyzing the process too much instead of just worshipping her without a goal in mind. Am I saying this mantra correctly? I've been chanting this for two weeks and it's not doing anything! How come so-and-so can hear things and I can't? I'm much older than her; this should be happening to me first!

The goal of our sadhana is to not have a goal. It is to surrender to Devi and do everything we can for Her without expecting or even hoping to get anything in return. It's a lifestyle that we must re-train our minds to comply with because in today's modern world, everything has become a tool with which to achieve an end.

But this lifestyle is entirely possible, which is what this issue shows with stories about the miracles of modern-day saints. The mahans in the feature section this month have all transcended outer and inner noise, and have served God just for the sake of doing so. Their goals were not to achieve the levels they have achieved, but to stay fervently concentrated on Devi forever. They have not only seen and heard Devi, they have become one with Her.

One could argue that these souls were born holy and were destined to be great right from the beginning. This is true, but their destinies would not have been fulfilled without a focus that they, as humans in this earthly birth, have had to train themselves to adopt. If they did not have to endure some kind of hardship and go through spiritual journeys (no matter how small or large), their teachings could not resonate so deeply with so many of us on a human level.

Another powerful group whose stories Aiya has been telling for years now are the Nayanmars, or 63 Tamil saints. From this issue on, the *Sri Chakra* will be publishing one story each month to re-tell the tales of devotion that these souls have lived.

Please see their stories and enjoy the rest of this issue. Deepest thanks goes out to our contributors, Aiya, Kathy Allen, Venugopala Rao Ganji, Professor V. Krishnamurthy, Suhir Ponnchamy, and Dr. Somaskanda, who worked tirelessly to fill this issue. An extra special thanks to Soumitra Sengupta!

Feel free to send your feedback to sri_chakra_mag@srividya.org because we are desperate for some e-mail! We welcome any comments, suggestions, questions, discussion, pictures, offers to volunteer, or anything you feel like sending us. This is *your* magazine!

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha!

The *Sri Chakra* staff



AUGUST

NEWSLETTER

Since the last issue...

Aiya bounced off the end of the May festival with a lot of travel to different areas around New York. He first went to Toronto to teach his monthly Sunday class for the local children. He also performed two cremations in the first couple of weeks in June, but was present at the temple in mid-June for the Pratyangira homam sponsored by Mr. Subbarao, the chosen successor to Guruji in Devipuram.

Throughout the latter weekends in June, Aiya spent a lot of time in New Jersey and performed two weddings and two private pujas there. During the Gurupoornima weekend on July 8, he performed a local wedding and then took off to Toronto for another kids class on the 9th. He returned in time for the Gurupoornima festivities and enjoyed an evening of bhajans after the celebrations. After conducting Aadi Amavasya and Aadi Puram in the last week of July, Aiya left for Dallas, Texas for a housewarming puja on the 29th.

Past Month Events

Gurupoornima, July 10

by Kamyam Ramaswamy

Gurupoornima was organized by the devotees from Hamilton and London (in Canada), and ran from 2:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Monday July 10. The focus was on the unity of the temple family, and the theme was the Guru Parampara. Portraits of gurus from past and present adorned the windowsill on the north side of the yajnasala, and five naga hoods stood tall behind Amma's and Aiya's seats at the eastern doors.

After they were welcomed in,



Aiya and Amma welcomed with an aarathi

Aiya and Amma performed puja to Guruji and Guru Garu, and then had Sodasaupachara puja performed to them. Bhaktas then got the chance to put flower petals on Aiya's and Amma's feet during the chanting of the Dattatreya Stavam, Guru Stotram, and the singing of bhajans. Selected devotees then personally got to express their feelings to Aiya and Amma, and some of the temple children put on a small play about the birth of Dattatreya. (Please visit www.srividy.org for more pictures).

Aadi Amavasya, June 24

by Abhi Somaskanda

The temple hosted about about 50 people registered to have a Srardham done on behalf of their deceased fathers. Aadi Amavasya is a day that tarpanam is offered to the paternal side of the family. Chitra purnami, celebrated earlier in the year, is for the maternal side.

Everyone had a chance to make three pindam balls each, consisting of banana, white flour, black sesame, ghee, and jaggery. After the balls were made, the group headed down to Kasi for

the ritual. Every person offered the three balls, a flower, and a fruit into the Genesee river and then performed abhishekam to the Kasi lingam. Following alankaram and a final arathi, everyone was served lunch.

Aiya also offered a plate of several cooked curries and rice to the deceased.

Aadi Pooram and Chandi Homam, June 28

by Abhi Somaskanda

This year's Aadi Pooram began with a Chandi Homam at 9am, led by Aiya and Dr. Vishwanathan. The homam's sponsors offered the elaborate ahuthis, which included 13 cotton saris, one for each chapter of the Chandi Path (Durga Saptasathi), along with coconuts, homa dravyam and a thirumangalyam among other offerings.

Vishnu Durga sat in front of the homa kunda throughout the morning, presiding over the event. During homam, abhishekam to Her commenced. Once the homam's Bhairava bali was given, everyone returned to the yajnasala to offer at least 7 different palaharam and foods to Vishnu Durga.

Traditionally, Aadi Pooram is celebrated as the day Devi attained womanhood. Many also celebrate this day as the day Mahalakshmi was born in the form of Aandal.

Chandi Homams will be now performed on this festival every year.

Varalakshmi Vratam, Aug 4

by Kamyā Ramaswamy

Married women were encouraged to participate in the Varalakshmi puja on the evening of Friday August 4. Ladies performed puja to Varalakshmi herself (in the form of a ghee deepam) for the well-being of their households and spouses. With all ladies surrounding a large lamp dressed as Devi, over 50 women sponsored the event. Following the puja, women tied the thread, and had delicious prasadam. Aiya and Amma also blessed every lady with vibhuthi, kumkuma, and a fruit.

Vibhuthi Saivaite Immersion Camp, Aug 5 - 12

by Abhi Somaskanda

The third year of the camp, ran from August 5-12. Children learned Hindu cultural games, the Tamil prayer Sivapuranam, stories, crafts, cooking and other arts. With a new facility for campers, the camp rounded out at almost 60 children. Paired with an outing, bhajans, dancing, and learning, every camper left wanting to add another week to the camp!

Ganapathi Chaturthi, Aug 27

by sAbhi Somaskanda

This year's Chaturthi happened inside the yajnasala due to weather constraints. Along with offering 1008 modakams into the fire, and abhisheka to the utsava Ganapathi, devotees got to do tarpanam 3 times to a coconut-sized Vinayaka shaped out of turmeric. This Ganapathi was later washed into the river down at Kasi

After lunch, Aiya led bhajans until the evening procession of utsava Ganapathi. Afterwards, everyone enjoyed maha prasadam and lively music.

Upcoming Events

Sharada Navaratri, Sept 22 - Oct 1

by Kamyā Ramaswamy

Eight days following the dvajarojanam (flag raising

ceremony) on September 15, Navaratri will begin. The celebrations this year will focus on Balatripurasundari and the 36 Tattvas. Each day, the entire Navarathri malar will be chanted with different variations on the pujas for every day of the festival. Abhishekams will happen daily as they do on regular Saturdays. Different homams will be performed throughout each day of the festival, with Aiya presiding as the main pujari. However, volunteers will be able to participate within each puja and/or homam.



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Vijayadasami/Kedaragowri begins, Oct 1

by Kamyā Ramaswamy

The last day of Navarathri is usually jam-packed with Chandhi Homam at 5 am, abhishekam, the procession of the Navaratri kalasam, and finally the Ratha, pulled by all the devotees.

In the evening, Kedaragowri commences. The Kedaragowri celebration is undertaken by women who wish to pray for the longevity and well-being of their husbands. It commemorates the vratham and austerities Devi undertook to merge with Shiva.

Along with Kedara Gowri Vratham, which lasts for 21 days, October 2nd and 3rd are the final rites of Navaratri. This includes Devi's Kulurthi ("cooling down"), bringing down the flag, udvasanam of all the festival's Dig Devata kalsams, and Bhairava bali.

In Two Months

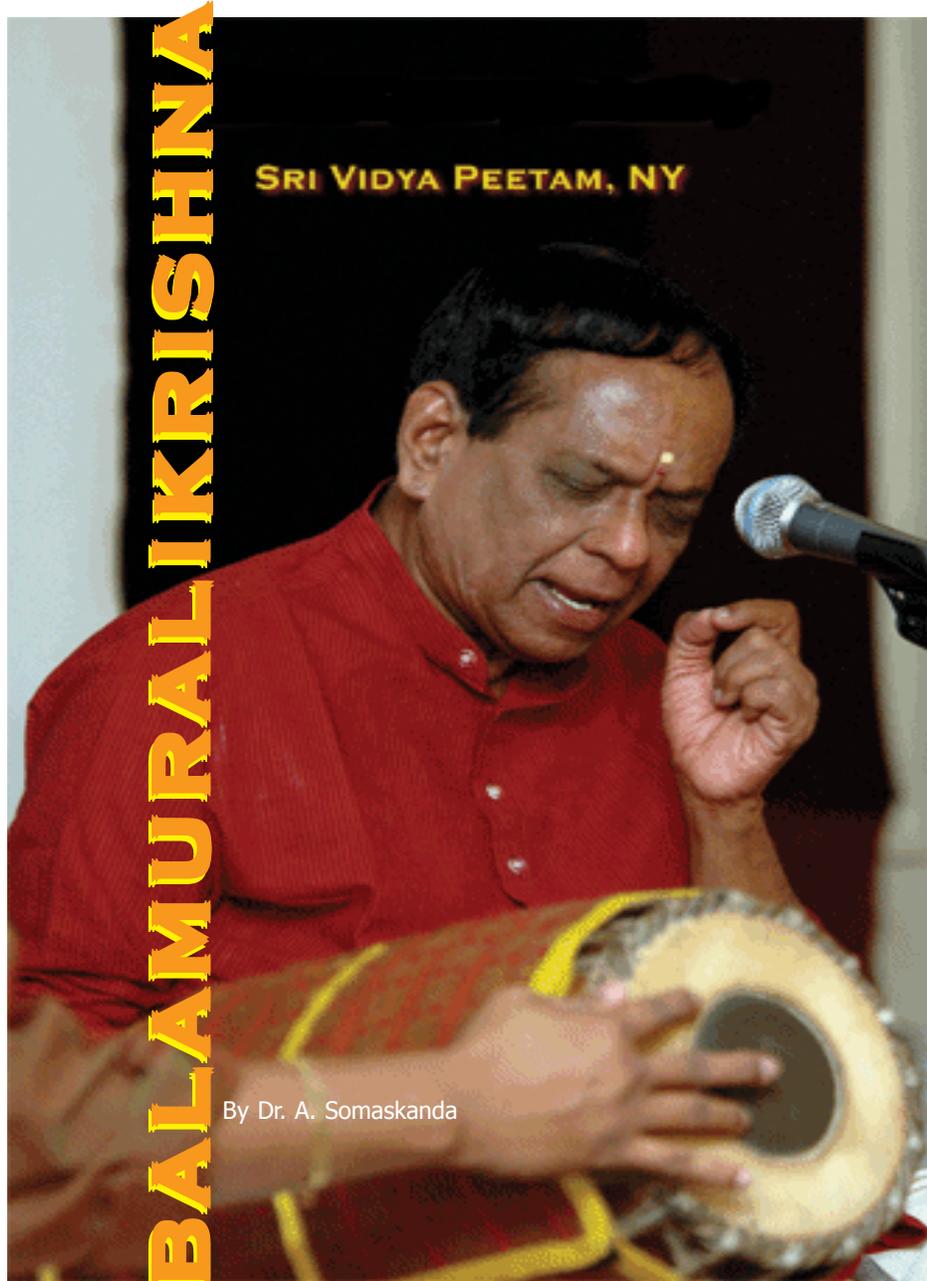
The next issue of the Sri Chakra Magazine

Devi willing, the next issue of the *Sri Chakra Magazine* will be up on the temple's website (www.srividya.org) at the beginning of November 2006. The next issue will focus on Balatripurasundari. As part of this year's Navarathri festivities, the issue will include articles on Bala, Her sadhana, and Her worship.

If you are interested in writing articles or taking pictures, please e-mail us at sri_chakra_mag@srividya.org.

If you would like to contribute, the deadline for submissions (photographs and/or articles) is Friday, October 20. Please be a part of this effort. We look forward to seeing your contributions and suggestions to help make this magazine the best it can be!

Sri Gurubhyo Namah!



By Dr. A. Somaskanda

Aficionados of carnatic music were treated to a musical extravaganza on the 6th of June, 2006 at the Sri Rajarajeswari temple in Rush, New York. The evening featured the legendary maestro, Dr. Balamurali Krishna, a musician/composer non pareil, who has been entrancing connoisseurs of music for more than 60 years. This peerless musical colossus with a deceptively diminutive figure and a mischievous smile has a booming voice laced with a thousand tonal warps and woofs and a majestic timbre.

Lasting close to 90 minutes, the concert more than lived up to its expectations and kept the audience spellbound. All but one of the compositions was chosen from his own rich repertoire.

The maestro commenced his concert with a captivating composition "Amma Ananda Dhayini"

in Gambhira Natta. Although traditionally a vira rasa pradhana raga, it sparkled with vinaya bhava and devotional fervor.

The second composition, "Amba Mamava," was a delightful swara mala in three ranjanis (Ranjam, Sri Ranjani, and Janaranjani). There was no elaborate delineation of the ragas with alapana and neraval, but his seamless glide from one raga to the next was an amazing feat be behold.

The third composition "Aaya Kalaigal," in Mohanam was the only song in Tamil. Mohanam is a universal raga that has its equivalent scales in several cultures of the world. It is a mellifluous audava raga with five swaras in both arohanam and avrohanam. It has elaborate and virtually limitless scope for alapanas and swara prasthanas. Dr. Balamurali Krishan's exposition of this raga is

always electrifying, as he plays magic with kalpanaswaras in myriad permutations and combinations. Although this rendition was somewhat abbreviated, it was nevertheless delightful and heartwarming.

The most elaborate of his renditions was the fourth composition, "Charanam," giving full scope for alapana, neraval, and kalpanaswaras. It was set in raga Kamavarthini (Panthuvarali), a mela raga. This brought to the fore the maestro's incredible vocal dexterity. Violin was equal to the task with solo versions and swara repartees in this ornate raga. Tiptoeing behind the maestro's resonant voice, the violin danced across the swara scale with a flurry of glissandos, capturing the essence of the raga. The rapport between the voice and violin was uncanny.

I think the maestro's piece de resistance, was his prosodic masterpiece "Omkaara Karini," set in an incredibly lilting raga Lavangi that he himself created out of four swaras (a svarantara raga). The scale for this raga is Sa Ri1 Ma1 Dha1 Sa (arohanam) and Sa Dha1 Ma1 Ri1 Sa (avarohanam, omitting Gandharam (Ga), Panchamam (Pa), and Nishadam (Ni). This sahitya is a spine tingling rhapsody in praise of Devi, the Universal Mother, wherein the bhaktha, in blissful ecstasy, describes the two faces of Devi – one of roudra (rage), that destroys the ego, and the other of abhayaka shubangi (auspiciousness and compassion). His voice rose in serpentine ascent though three octaves to a crescendo and cascades down to a diminuendo with a thousand dazzling nuances that can only be possible by this maestro. Tears welled up in my eyes and I felt goose bumps as his intonations and variations seemingly spoke to the Goddess.

His concluding kriti, preceded by a short number in raga Punnakavarali, and a delightful Tillana in Kathanakuthukalam, was "Dharma Samvarthini." This

piece segued into a mangalam, the only song not composed by Dr. Balamurali Krishna. It was in the cadent Madhyamavathi raga, which is a pentatonic scale with numerous compositions and semi-classical numbers to its credit.

Veteran violinist Vittal Ramamurthy was outstanding in his own right and a perfect spoil for the maestro.

The ebullient mridangist, Ramakrishna, disciple of Ghatam-great, Vikku Vinayakaram, accompanied the maestro with verve, blinding speed, and adroitness. His thaniavarthanam with its infinite rhythmic variations was a treat to savor.

This concert will remain fresh in our memory for a long time to come.



**Above: Violinist Vittal Ramamurthy
Below: Mridangist Ramakrishna
accompanies Balamuralikrishna**



TEMPLE

LORE

The stories of the devotees at the Sri Rajarajeswari Peetam create the very essence of the temple's soul.

Aiya has verified all these tales for their authenticity, and he urges devotees to share their experiences for the benefit of future generations. All identities will be kept in the strictest confidentiality unless otherwise informed.

compiled by Kamya Ramaswamy



A Toronto devotee attended the Sri Kamakshi temple in Kanchipuram, one of the most ancient temples in all of India. As she was going around the temple with her family, a mysterious sannyasi appeared and seemed to be walking faster than all of them. He was very small and had a very peaceful expression on his face. He smiled at them, passed them as they circumambulated the temple, and entered the sanctum sanctorum through a back door.

The family later asked the priest of the temple to show them that back door. He said he had been working there for 30 years, and the temple was 3500 years old—there was no back door. After the family told him what happened, he laughed and said Adi Shankara, himself, had given them his darshanam!



Volunteers at the temple were setting up for evening puja during a minor festival day and found they didn't have enough fruits for all the sannidhis. The new policy at the temple was to give every sannidhi a large fruit (like an apple or orange) and a small fruit (like grapes or cherries). There were no small fruits left in the temple and the evening puja had already begun.

Just when the volunteers thought it was Devi's will to only have one fruit at each sannidhi this time, a female visitor who had just arrived from Toronto walked up to them and handed them a bag of cherries! The volunteers were stunned!



DID YOU



KNOW?

- * That many holy saints were often considered lunatics?
- * About 10 % of all sadhus in India are female and they are called *sadhvis*?
- * That many rishis and saints of previous yugas are still alive and practicing japam in hidden areas all over India?
- * That amsams and rishis sometimes choose to be reborn in kali yuga because a little bit of japam now is equal to thousands of years of penance in previous yugas?
- * Saints are not always naturally born, but are holy because they follow dharma and the truth at any cost?
- * The defining characteristic of saints is that they have broken the boundary of third-dimensional thought—this lets them see everyone the same and express great love and joy to all of God's creations?
- * Saints always live simple lives and have conquered their emotions?
- * Many saints are responsible for breaking down the caste and gender barriers in traditional Hindu society—Swami Dayananda and Vivekananda are two examples
- * Sadhus typically live off bhiksha provided by families, and spend most of their time in meditation



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NAYANMARS

STARTING WITH THIS ISSUE, THE SRI CHAKRA JOURNAL WILL BE PUBLISHING ONE NAYANMAR STORY PER ISSUE. THIS MONTH'S STORY FOCUSES ON NANDANAR.

august 2006

Thirunalaipovar (Nandanar)

Born in Adanur on the banks of the river Kolleedam as an untouchable, Nandanar could not enter the temples nearby because of his caste. As a great devotee of Shiva he prayed and yearned to be able to visit Thiruppankoor, a Shiva temple about an hour away from Chidambaram. When he inquired about making the trip, the landlord Nandanar worked for refused to allow him to go without tilling 40 acres of land in one day. Nandanar prayed to Lord Shiva that night and pleaded with him to help fulfill his dream of visiting Shiva's temple. By the next day, Shiva himself tilled all 40 acres and Nandanar's landlord realized he was no ordinary devotee of Shiva.

At Thiruppankoor, Nandanar realized he could not go inside because of his caste, so he prayed every day to see a vision of the Shivalingam inside the temple. But Nandanar could not see the lingam because Nandi, Shiva's vahana, was blocking it. Praying to Shiva again, Nandanar asked that Nandi move aside so that he could see the lingam. Amazingly, the Nandi moved aside, and even today, he remains a few feet from the center!

Overwhelmed with gratitude and love, Nandanar built Thiruppankoor its own temple tank.

During a public discourse, he heard about the wonderous shrine at Chidambaram, regarded as one of the most important Shivalayams. Passionately, he desired to see Chidambaram, but let the days go by out of fear of rejection. He kept saying he would begin the journey the next day. The villagers nearby thus named him Thirunalaipovaar (in Tamil, "he'll go tomorrow").

Finally, Nandanar set off for Chidambaram. He stood outside the gates of the Nataraja temple and cried—even other devotees prayed to Nataraja to have mercy on him. Because of his caste, he was unable to cross the gates. Seeing His devotee's anguish, Nataraja came into all of the Chidambaram priests' dreams one night. He told the priests to walk Nandanar through a sacrificial fire the next morning, after bathing. Nandanar entered the fire and was bathed by the flames until he became golden. He emerged a Brahmin, wearing a yajnopavitam (sacredthread). The Tillai Brahmins carried him on a palanquin toward the Nataraja. He placed his foot on the first step leading up to the temple and, in front of everyone's eye, he disappeared!

MODERN DAY



SAINTS

“WHENEVER AND WHEREVER A DECLINE OF
RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PREDOMINANCE OF
UNRIGHTEOUSNESS PREVAILS;

AT THAT TIME I MANIFEST MYSELF PERSONALLY...
FOR PROTECTION OF THE DEVOTEES AND THE
ANNIHILATION OF THE WICKED AND TO FULLY
ESTABLISH RIGHTEOUSNESS,

I APPEAR MILLENIUM AFTER MILLENIUM”

- BHAGAVAD GITA

It is often said that special souls have the ability, unlike the rest of us, to choose their parents and family lineage. In the latter half of the 1800s, the family of Kamakoti Shastri was one of the few surviving bloodlines Adi Shankara had chosen to inhabit Kanchipuram more than 2000 years prior. Again, this family was chosen to raise the child who would grow up to be one of the most endearing and unusual sages of Tamil Nadu.

Kamakoti Shastri was the head of the famed Sri Kamakshi temple in Kanchipuram and had but one biological child, a daughter named Seshammal. His older brother, Chitambara Shastri, was also a priest but had four

Maragatham conceived and gave birth to a son, Sesha, on Saturday January 22, 1870, during Hasta nakshatram of Thai maasam.

Sesha enraptured the people of his village and grew up learning slokams with precision. His old soul shone through a young body in the extreme calm and concentration he showed while worshipping. On the way to the temple one day, a street vendor gifted Sesha a small Krishna statue. The next day, the shopkeeper ran to meet Sesha and his mother and told them he had sold a thousand of the same statues that same day. He kissed Sesha and called him "Thanga kai" (golden hands).

His family worried about his lack of personal care and unkempt appearance, along with strange habits like meditating in burial grounds (this was highly unbecoming to members of the Brahmin caste back then). Yet, he continued his sadhana unperturbed.

On a trip to the Sri Kamakshi temple, he met his future guru, Balaji Swami and the connection was electric. He tirelessly served Balaji Swami and discussed with him endless spiritual topics. It marked the transformation of Seshadri Swamigal from a boy into a saint. Balaji Swami initiated the young man of 18 into sannyasm.

SIDDHA PURUSHA

THE DIVINITY OF SRI SESHADRI SWAMIGAL

by Kamyā Ramaswamy, with notes from Ms. Indhu



children. The youngest, a girl named Maragatham, had the very air of Devi, Herself. She was smart and beautiful, and she had an extremely close bond with her uncle, Kamakoti Shastri.

Kamakoti unofficially assumed the role of her adopted father.

His love for her was so great that he arranged her marriage to a young man named Varadarajar, who was handsome and decent. Years after they were married, however, the young couple found that they had no luck conceiving children.

Coming from a long line of Sri Vidya upasakas, the two prayed and undertook severe fasts and austerities for a baby. Even the detached Kamakoti Shastri could not bear to see their suffering and quietly implored his Mother, Sri Kamakshi, to relieve them. She told Kamakoti to feed Maragatham the butter prasadam offered to Her in puja. In due time,

Sesha's future mimicked the divinity of his childhood, but he learned detachment quickly. His father, realizing his own untimely death, forewarned Sesha to care for the family when he was still a teenager. Maragatham, now a widow, took Sesha to care for the aging Kamakoti Shastri until his passing less than two years later. Unable to bear the demise of her husband and father, Maragatham shouted, "Arunachalam" thrice before she too passed.

From the moment he heard the sacred word on his mother's lips, Seshadri was immersed in dispassion and set out to find the holy land of Thiruvannamalai. His family tried to stop him and/or get him married, but his horoscope said he was destined to be a great yogi. He chanted the mantras he learned from childhood without a break and rigorously performed Sandhya Vandhanam every day.

Reaching Thiruvannamalai was now the saint's primary goal. His family tried to lock him up in a room, convinced he had gone mad with the deaths of his loved ones. But when they looked out the window, there he was running away! His feats told them he was not insane, but a highly developed soul that could not be restrained.

Upon arriving in Annamalai, he entered into the temple of Arunachaleswar and Unnamalai and simultaneously entered into a state of permanent bliss. The year was 1889 and Seshadri Swamigal would stay in Arunachalam for the next 40 years.

He was an individual with several striking peculiarities. His dynamic voice was sometimes heard singing the hymns composed by his grandfather, Kamakoti Shastri. He interacted lovingly with villagers and especially small children but never grew attached to anyone.



He would wear rags and quickly dirty new clothes given to him to eschew the bonds of materialism. He rarely slept and ate little—the food he did eat was often stale and foul-smelling.

Shopkeepers would wait for him and invite him to toss the cash from their registers because it was a guarantee that business would boom. Sick and ailing villagers would take any remedy he prescribed, even if it was a handful of sand because it would be an instant cure. A cot given to him to sleep on largely went ignored and gathered dust until the giver begged him to at least sit on it. After he did, the villagers gathered the dust and took it home to use as an all-purpose medicine.

Some years after Seshadri Swamikal came to Annamalai, he realized the presence of another great soul in the area. He told

some men at the Arunachaleshwar temple to find a boy in the depths of the property who was doing intense penance and to bring him above-ground. Behind a shivalingam in the temple cellar, the men found a young boy who would later be known as Ramana Maharshi, but was now gravely injured by rats and insects that had eaten his body. He did not know it because he was lost in tapas.

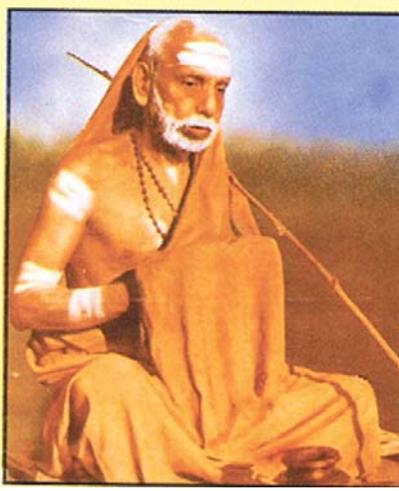
Seshadri Swamikal revived the child with the same protection he gave to all his bhaktas. He comforted grieving parents with more children, blessed prostitutes with financial security, and even made sour foods taste sweet with one touch. His oneness with the Mother restored a blind boy's sight, brought several people back from the brink of death, and inspired suffering in anyone who dared harm his students.

He taught them to never place importance on caste, for it would prevent focus on one's sadhana. He advocated total concentration and control of the five senses. In the late 1920s, he posed a question to one of his students, Subalakshmi Ammal in his usual indirect style. He asked her if he should build another house for himself. She told him to go ahead, unaware that he was asking her opinion on whether it was time for him to leave his body.

In a subsequent celebration, Swamikal's bhaktas wished to perform abhishekam on him, despite his protests. He knew his time was near and wished to spend his last days in peace. But to appease them, he told them they could do whatever they wanted except for putting water on his head. They intended to follow their guru's wishes but in their overzealousness got caught up in the abhishekam until pots and pots of water had been poured on Swamikal's entire body. Soon after, the fever broke out.

Swamikal was feverish for 40 days straight, sometimes walking around like normal but looking weak and wane. He would frolic about as usual in the rain, sometimes slipping in the mud and unable to get up, but refusing anyone's help. He also refused to be bedridden and only stayed inside when he no longer had the strength to move. Scores of doctors came from far and wide, but could do nothing when Devi had decided to bring Her son back to his rightful place.

On Friday January 4, 1929, Seshadri Swamikal lay still with peace on his face. He attained Maha Samadhi at the exact time when the planets were identical to the moment of his birth 59 years ago. He was buried where his ashram stands today and still makes appearances in certain devotees. Those who visit Thiruvannamalai will surely feel his presence.



KANCHI MAHASWAMIGAL,

THE JIVAN- MUKTA

by Professor V. Krishnamurthy
E-mail: profvk@yahoo.com

Descriptions of a Jivan-mukta (self-realized person) abound profusely in advaitic literature. They actually cover a wide spectrum. Here is an interesting description from Shivanandalahari (#81), which is relevant in the context of this article:

Oh Lord! To spend some time in offering archanas to Your lotus feet, to spend some time in dhyana and samadhi and in prostrations to You, to spend some time in listening to stories about You, to spend again some time in viewing Your beautiful Forms and in prayerful stotras to them—Whoever thus spends his time and enjoys the beatific immersement in You, is he not already a Jivan-mukta?

I have a personal experience of seeing the Kanchi Mahaswamigal (1894-1994) in such a jivan-mukta stage around 1989. I was visiting the Kanchi Mutt for a dharshan of the three Acharyas. It was an evening (around 7 p.m.) when the Kamakshi deity of Kanchipuram was having the 10-day annual festival and that was the day of the "Kudirai-vAhanaM" (i.e., the deity would be taken in a procession seated on the palanquin riding a horse).

And it appears before the deity is taken round the town for the procession, they had the habit of bringing the palanquin to the gate of the Kanchi Mutt so that the Mahaswamigal could have a darshan of the deity. And thus the procession appeared at the gate of the Mutt.

Being totally unaware of the day's routine, I was just mingling and conversing with a few

persons inside the Mutt hoping to be able to see the Mahaswamigal in due course. But suddenly I heard a bustle of movement; every one was rushing to the gate. And then I knew something was happening there and I also moved with the crowd. Lo and behold! The sight that I saw there was scintillating.

The Mahaswamigal had problems of vision those days. Maybe he could see very little at a distance. So he was there standing at the gate, in fact on the road near the gate, almost very near the palanquin of the divine deity. Heavy searchlights were being focused on the deity for the Acharya to see Her clearly. Of course, She had been decorated to the fullest, what with gold, diamond, pearl, ruby and emerald. And what an abundance of flowers of all colours on Her!

The Acharya was standing on the ground with his hands cupped over his eyes for him to see clearly. Perhaps on one side the lights were blinding his eyes. He was straining hard to have a vision of the majesty of the deity that was presented before him. He was moving his head this side and that side to optimize his view.

Everyone was silent. It was difficult to decide, for us spectators, whether the Acharya was there to have dharshan of Kamakshi or whether Kamakshi was there to have a dharshan of the Acharya! This serene silence and the drama of the Mahaswamigal slapping his cheeks in traditional token of his having dharshan of the Goddess continued for probably a full four

or five minutes or so. And at last he turned to walk inside the mutt and the disciples led him on.

I came back to earth realizing just then that I had been witnessing all along a divine scene which I can never forget! Mark Ye, all devotees! What great necessity was there for this Jivan-mukta to have a dharshan of the deity with such great difficulty? And what did he achieve? But that is the characteristic of a Jivan-mukta!

But don't think that a Jivan-mukta is just only a spectacle for us, ordinary mortals. This Jivan-mukta, the Kanchi Mahaswamigal, was so simple, humble, profound, enlightened, compassionate, scholarly and full of Grace that he naturally and effortlessly touched the hearts of

men and women, prince and pauper, around the world.

Through a major part of his life he talked to us masses in million ways and was never tired of telling us to mend our ways, telling us how and why. His lessons to us are known to fill up volumes. I am reproducing just one of those million lessons in the following paragraphs, purely as a sample and a homage. Being a summary of a speech of his on modern ways of education, it is just a drop of honey certainly, from the ocean of his divine counsel.

He traces the modern erosion in moral values to our moving away from the Gurukula system of education. It is the Gurukula system, he says, that takes one away from the pressures and

diversions of the so-called civilised urban life and environment. It protects one from the distractions that invade a celibate discipline.

The insistence that the sishya should reside with the Guru all the time ensures that he imbibes not only the oral teachings of the Guru but has the fullest opportunity of a total apprenticeship in the practice of a disciplined life. And most of all, the humility that one learns and absorbs as a part of his own behaviour is the greatest asset for one's education.

The tough life of the Gurukula residency is the surest way of taming one's ego, if not of totally eradicating it. In addition, every bit of learning had a basis or a background of Divinity associated



with it either as part of tradition or as part of the learning itself, and this certainly helps to confront and counter the arrogance of scholarship and the *aham-kâra* that creep in.

On the other hand, the greatest ill of the system of present-day education is a syllabus that has no human or cultural values dove-tailed into it. Actually the modern fashion has dichotomized learning and behaviour. One may or may not profess what he learns but in both cases one's behaviour has come to mean something that is independent of the learning amassed; so completely independent that the incidence of crime and misbehaviour is far higher among the educated urban population than among the rural uneducated. It is clear that we have been miseducating rather than educating!

The Mahaswamigal therefore recommends, in fact strongly insists, that, as a minimum programme:

As many 'educated' people as possible should go through the process of Gurukula residentship for some period in their active life.

The traditional sastras should be learnt mostly through the Gurukula system.

The Gurukula locations should, as far as possible, be away from the din and dust of the 'pollution' of modern civilization.

The disciples who go for whole time Gurukula system should be supported lavishly by stipends, without however being polluted by the sin of affluence. Towards this objective they should be wholly involved in putting in physical labour towards maintaining the system and in 'begging' their *Bikshâ*, at times.

While scholars of the various subjects should be ready to do some bit of sacrifice to give their time and energy to make the schemes of Gurukula system work, it is the responsibility of the general public to see that those scholars who are prepared to spend their time as gurus in these

gurukulas should be more than adequately compensated for their dedication and effort.

These pockets of gurukulas should be spread across the country in hundreds, nay, thousands, of rural locations and in some sense the gurus of these places need not be permanent for life. They may work in 'secular' jobs elsewhere but they may come and go just as we indent foreign professors for specific jobs in specific educational institutions.

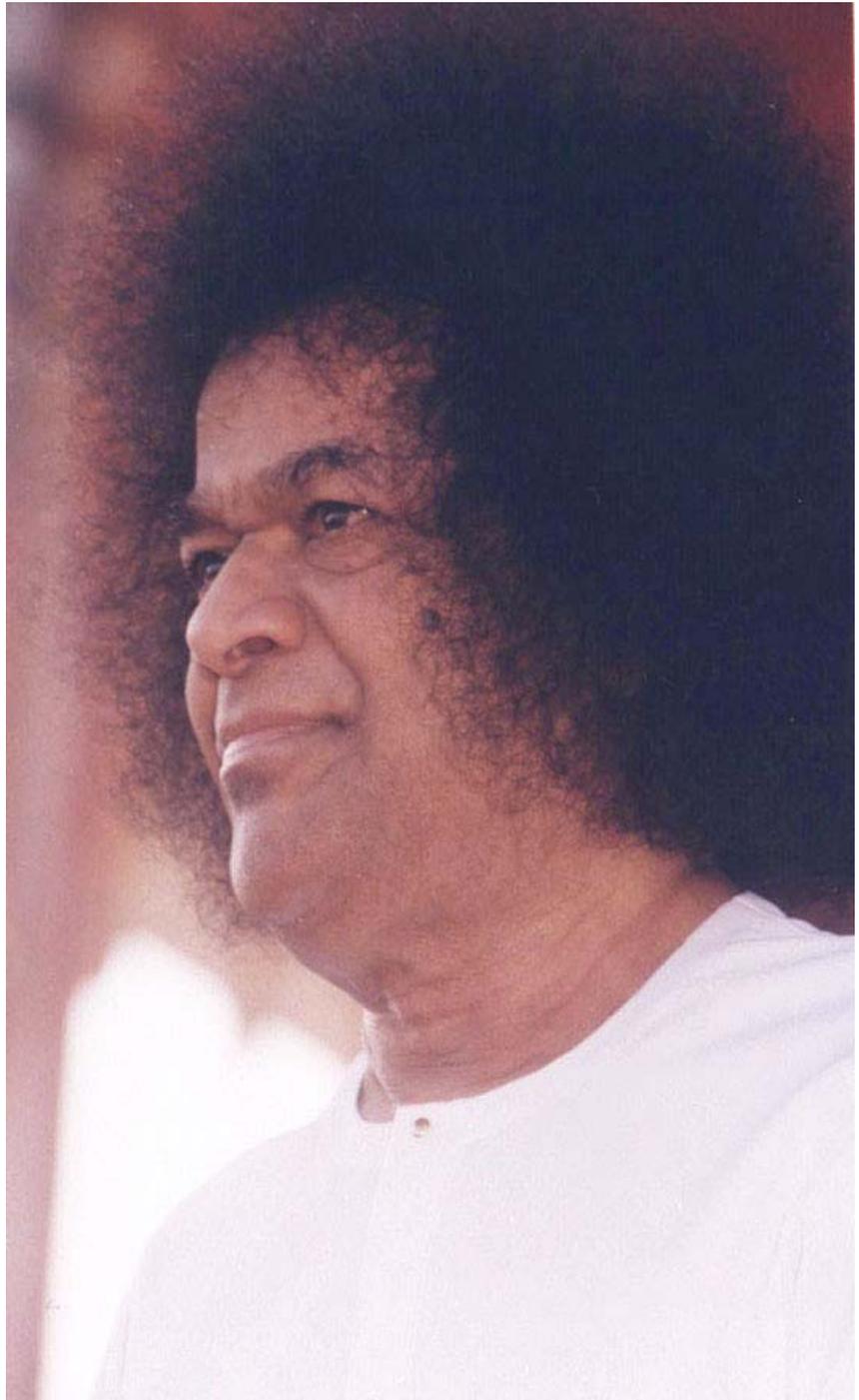
While the Gurukula system will certainly not be a substitute for the modern system of education, in due course of time it should prove to be a good supplement to whatever educational system that is in vogue for 'secular' purposes; in fact the course of history must be shaped in such a manner as would eradicate this disease of separating the 'secular' purpose from the value-oriented education.

Though these gurukulas may be in distinct pockets of physical locations, they must be operated in such a way that in the course of probably half-a-century or so they must have become part of the life-style of the country. Just as during the time of war some countries insist that all their citizens should have gone through a specific period of service in the military, so also we should be able to insist that every 'educated' citizen should have gone through the Gurukula at least for one or two years in their life either as a guru or a *sisya*!

You can see how the Acharya 'descends,' for our sake, from his *Jivan-mukta* heights to our mundane level and talks to us in our own language on our problems, for our benefit. Our benefit was his concern and that is the unexplainable greatness of *Jivan-muktas* like the Mahaswamigal, for whom, what we see as *jagat*, is actually Brahman, because, they 'are always in Brahman' — **brahmani te sthitAH** (B.G. V – 19).

Sri Sathya Sai Baba is one of the most revered spiritual Masters of today's world, who has millions of followers spread all over the continents. Born on 23rd November 1926 in a tiny hamlet Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh in the South of India, Baba or Swami as His devotees affectionately call him, never set foot in the Western world.

Yet, Baba's simple, practical, relevant and spiritually powerful teachings, which are universal in nature and aimed at uniting the mankind, have been positively impacting varying faiths and races alike for the last six decades.



KALIYUGA AVATAR: SRI SATHYA SAI BABA by Venugopala Rao Ganji

Through His timeless and universal message of love, *Baba* is quietly transforming the world by re-establishing in everyday living the eternal human values of...

Truth (*Sathya*)
 Righteousness (*Dharma*)
 Peace (*Shanthi*)
 Love (*Prema*) and
 Non-violence (*Ahimsa*)

The pursuit of **Truth** will lead to **Righteous conduct**, Righteous conduct promotes **Peace**; Peace enables one to **Love**, and **Love is God**. *Baba* exhorts us to **Live in Love**.

Baba says:

I have come to light the lamp of Love in your hearts, to see that it shines day by day with added luster. I have not come on any mission of publicity for any sect or creed or cause, nor have I come to collect followers for my doctrine. I have come to tell you of the Universal unitary faith, the path of Love. Believe that all Hearts are motivated by the one and only God, that all names in all languages and all forms man can conceive, denote the one and only God. Cultivate the attitude of oneness between people of all creeds, all countries and all continents. This is the message of Love I bring.

Emphasizing that all religions are facets of the same Truth, *Baba* proclaims, "Let the different faiths exist, let them flourish... Respect the difference between the faiths and recognize them, so long as they do not extinguish the flame of Unity." He often reminds us all that,

There is only ONE religion; the religion of Love
 There is only ONE language; the language of the Heart
 There is only ONE race, the race of Humanity
 There is only ONE God and He is Omnipresent.

As a child, *Sri Sathya Sai Baba* demonstrated the divine qualities of compassion, wisdom, generosity, the desire to serve others and great respect for elders. He also displayed incredible miraculous powers be it materializing sacred ash (*Vibhuti*), a diamond, reviving the dead, transcending space and time or defying all physical laws.

He could quote extensively from and comprehensively discuss the spiritual texts without ever having studied them; nor had he any formal higher education or a Guru. He established his spiritual headquarters (*ashram*) known as *Prashanthi Nilayam* (The Abode of the Highest Peace) at *Puttaparthi*.

On October 29, 1940, at the age of 14, he declared to his family and to the people of his village that his mission was to bring about the spiritual regeneration of humanity by demonstrating and teaching the highest principles of truth, righteous conduct, peace, and divine love.

His mission was further amplified in a letter he wrote to his brother in 1947. "I have a task," he said, "to foster all mankind and ensure for all of them lives full of bliss. I have a vow: to lead all who stray away from the straight path again into goodness and save them. I am attached to a work that I love: To remove the sufferings of the poor and grant them what they lack."

By exhorting "Love All—Serve All, Help Ever—Hurt Never," which is the quintessence of the Holy Scriptures, *Baba* prescribes and urges mankind to take up Service (*seva*) activities to ameliorate the downtrodden, the dispossessed and the forlorn, recognizing the God in them.

"My Life is My Message," says *Baba* who lives by precept.

Perhaps never before in the history of mankind were such gigantic humanitarian and selfless activities initiated and successfully accomplished, than by *Baba* in his lifetime. These endeavours incurred stupendous

costs and were inconceivable even for governments. Of the innumerable humanitarian projects/activities, *Baba* made it possible to:

* Establish scores of schools, colleges and a university named *Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning* (1981), where education is provided totally free from Kindergarten to Post-Graduation. *Baba* says, "Education is for the mind and therefore, should be given free."

* Execute mammoth ongoing drinking water supply projects costing over \$150 million. There are about three in *Andhra*



ANDHRA WATER SUPPLY PROJECT
 One of *Sathya Sai Baba's* greatest service projects has been his amazing ongoing project to supply fresh drinking water to remote villages in rural India. The people of these impoverished villages had for many years been without drinkable water until 1995 when *Swami* began construction on this massive undertaking.

Pradesh (1995 & 2000), one in *Tamil Nadu* (2004) and currently in *Karnataka*, catering to thousands of parched villages with free drinking water. *Baba* says, "Water is needed for survival, and therefore should be provided free."

* Build scores of clinics and hospitals—and notably two Super Specialty Hospitals in *Puttaparthi* (1995) and *Bangalore* (2000)—operating on state-of-the-art technology, where all the treatment including transplantation of kidneys, and

open heart surgeries are performed free. Baba says, "Health is needed for well-being of the body and therefore should be given free."

* Establish over 5000 Sai Centres throughout the world to serve all spiritual seekers, where membership is offered free regardless of religion, creed or race or gender. This is to help people realize their innate divinity through spiritual, educational and service activities promoting human values and encouraging people to undertake charitable tasks to reach out to communities everywhere. Baba says, "Spirit of Love is Spirituality."

* Lay special emphasis on Education in Human Values (EHV) to be imparted in all schools integrating with the curriculum to build strong moral character in children who will be the citizens of tomorrow. Over 140 countries world-wide accepted to implement this aim. Baba says, "The end of Education is Character."

* Initiate Village Service, serving hundreds of the poorest of the poor, providing them with free housing, food, and further providing them with some regular income. Baba says, "Gramma Seva is Rama Seva"—Service to mankind is Service to the Lord.



* Encouraged students and devotees to form teams of volunteers called Messengers of Sri Sathya Sai to undertake disaster relief work wherever there is a need (Gujarat Earthquake, Tsunami relief, etc.), who serve silently with love. Baba says, "Hands that serve are holier than the lips that pray."

Through His inspirational discourses and writings, Sathya Sai Baba has offered a veritable ocean of knowledge and guidance on all aspects of spiritual, religious, social, economic, and value-oriented living. He has often repeated that it is not necessary to drink the whole ocean to know its taste, that it is not necessary to read all scriptures to live a life of joy, peace, and love; it is enough to put into practice one aspect of spiritual teaching.

Baba has given His life, selflessly and magnanimously, to the service of mankind. His formula for world peace:

If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character.

If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home.

If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation.

When there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.



Sri Gurubhyo Namah